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Reagan Phones Carter to Explain CIA Remark

Georgian Reported 'Still Mad' After Successor Denies Blaming Him for Bombing in Beirut

By JACK NELSON, *Times Washington Bureau Chief*

WASHINGTON—President Reagan, stung by the furor over his recent comments suggesting that the U.S. Embassy annex near Beirut was vulnerable to terrorists because of actions taken in previous administrations, on Friday telephoned former President Jimmy Carter and denied that he had ever meant to blame the Carter Administration for the Sept. 20 bombing.

The President's call, made one day after Carter and other Democratic leaders angrily denounced Reagan's remarks, did not placate the former President. Carter associates described him as "still damn mad."

Student's Question

Reagan, in response to a question from a student at Bowling Green State University in Ohio last Wednesday, had suggested that the failure of embassy security stemmed from what he called "the near destruction of our intelligence capability in recent years." The student had asked about security precautions at the embassy annex, where the bombing killed 13 to 23 persons, including two Americans.

Although Carter refused to discuss his conversation with Reagan, associates of the former President said he flatly rejects Reagan's explanation that the press distorted his comments. And they said the President further irritated Carter by saying that he had really meant to blame "the Frank Church Committee" for weakening the CIA and thereby damaging intelligence capability that might have prevented the bombing.

Reagan was referring to the Senate Intelligence Committee, which, in the 1970s, was headed by the late Sen. Frank Church (D-

Idaho). Democratic presidential nominee Walter F. Mondale was a member of the committee until he left the Senate in 1977 to become Carter's vice president.

CIA Director William J. Casey, who was chairman of Reagan's election campaign in 1980, has refused to comment on Reagan's charges about the decline of the CIA in previous years. But Intelligence Committee Vice Chairman Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-N.Y.) Friday released a copy of a letter dated March 8, 1984, in which Casey wrote, "All of us know that the increase in the personnel and budgetary strength of the agency began in 1979, that it was planned and proposed earlier, and that it cannot be completed without strong bipartisan support."

In the letter, addressed to Moynihan, Casey said he was "particularly pained" that a Wall Street Journal story had suggested that the "agency's revival" would be "a partisan political theme in the reelection campaign."

"I can assure you that neither I nor the agency will be a part of any such thing," Casey wrote. "I've checked and been assured that there is no intention to go out to make any such issue."

The White House moved quickly to try to quell the controversy over Reagan's comments regarding the latest terrorist attack in Lebanon. Although an anonymous White House official had said Wednesday that reporters "would not be wrong" in assuming that Reagan had meant to blame Carter for weakening the CIA's intelligence capability, other White House officials Thursday insisted that Reagan had not been blaming the former President.

And Reagan, with his chief political adviser, White House Chief of Staff James A. Baker III, at his side in the Oval Office, telephoned Carter at 9:05 a.m. Friday at his

home in Plains, Georgia. The conversation lasted only four minutes.

White House officials disclosed the first details of the call and said Reagan felt strongly that the press had distorted his remarks and that he owed Carter an explanation. But they said it was not an apology and said that they could offer no information on Carter's response.

A White House official, saying that he was quoting from notes of the conversation taken by Baker, quoted Reagan as telling Carter:

"I was not suggesting that you or your Administration was responsible for the decline in intelligence-gathering capability, and I certainly did not suggest that your Administration was the cause of what happened at the embassy in Beirut."

In his telephone conversation, the official continued, Reagan said that he "could understand how Carter might have misunderstood him."

However, Carter associates said that the former President had read the White House transcript of Reagan's remarks and believed that they were clearly aimed at his Administration.

Reagan's full quote was: "The real protection and where we're feeling the effects today of the near destruction of our intelligence capability in recent years—before we came here, the effort that somehow to say, well, spying is somehow dishonest and let's get rid of our intelligence agents, and we did that to a large extent. Your biggest protection is to—and we're trying to rebuild our intelligence to where you'll find out and know in advance what the target might be and be prepared for it."

After his conversation with Reagan, Carter told associates that he would have no further public comment on the matter and that "I will let my original statement stand."

In that statement, Carter said: "This series of tragedies in the Middle East has been brought about by the President's own deeply flawed policy and inadequate security precautions in the face of proven danger."

He added that he had refrained from responding to "a stream of false assertions made by President Reagan in his attempt to blame his every mistake and failure on me and others who served before him in the White House" but that "his claim that his predecessors are responsible for the repeated terrorist bombings of Americans is personally insulting and too gross in its implications to ignore."